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CIA JUST DOING ITS JOB

Covert Work Part Of Mission

THE CENTRAL Intelligence Agency has had its share of successes since its founding shortly after World War II, but in recent years its reputation has been sullied by a series of failures, real or perceived.

The current round of disclosures and allegations could well set off CIA critics to renew efforts to bring the CIA under their collective thumb, however ill-considered their proposals may be.

The last time this happened was in 1975, shortly after it was alleged that the agency had illegally spied on thousands of Americans.

To investigate the charges, President Ford appointed an eight-member panel headed by Vice President Rockefeller and the Senate established a special panel under the leadership of Frank Church, D-Idaho.

AS A RESULT of findings, the Senate and House set up permanent committees to oversee intelligence activities. However, the Church committee left the greater part of CIA covert operations unexplored.

Although the agency has taken part in such activities almost from the beginning, it never was clear whether they were sanctioned by the National

Security Act—the 1947 law that set up the CIA, made it responsible to a newly founded National Security Council and established a unified Department of Defense.

The new agency established a “special procedures group,” taking authority from a clause in the act which said the CIA would “perform such additional services of common concern as the NSC determines can be more efficiently accomplished centrally.”

Far from disapproving, the NSC went further in a directive issued in 1948.

This authorized creation of the CIA's Office of Policy Coordination to perform operations “so planned and conducted that any U.S. government responsibility for them is not evident to unauthorized persons and if uncovered the U.S. government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them.”

The principle of “deniability” has governed CIA covert operations ever since, as well it should. As recent developments have shown, though, the CIA is finding it ever more difficult to keep its clandestine operations covert, as was intended, rather than overt, for national security's sake.